

RUNNING HEAD: Returning Students' Study Skills

Design Rationale for Returning Students' Study Skills

Blog and Wiki Facilitated Instruction

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The Adult Learner

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College for the new and returning student is an adjustment that many individuals find unsettling. The study habits learned in high school are oftentimes inadequate or antiquated for college level schoolwork. When deficiencies in study habits are exposed, the individual will either internalize that feeling leading to self-doubt or ignore the problem and hope it goes away on its own. Obviously, neither alternative will address the fundamental need to acquire new techniques or habits.

Compounding this problem is the belief that they are unique and therefore no one can help them. Still, when shown they are hardly unique, they do not wish to become branded as “dumb”. Consequently, the individual will go to great lengths to avoid asking for helping, in particular face-to-face assistance.

The intent of module is to create awareness of deficiencies in specific skills needed for academic success and to provide instruction and resources to remedy those deficiencies. To accommodate the busy lives of adult learners who are returning students, the instruction is tailored to include only the topics the individual requires to excel. The module we created is a blog that the adult learner can easily navigate. Two assessments, four main topics, a site to share insights and tips, and a feedback poll are included in our module. We have addressed the requirements of this assignment by incorporating elements that will reach learners with different information processing modes. The module, as a whole, follows the experiential learning cycle described by Pfeiffer and Jones (1975).

Learner Analysis

The learners for this project are the students in Adult Learning. This is a disparate group unified by the fact that all are returning students. Returning students are all familiar with study skills and with their personal strategies to reach success in school. However, certain skills may need to be refreshed or improved. In addition, the students are busy and may be reluctant to seek help through on-campus resources. Therefore, the instruction will be self-guided so it can be completed when convenient and conducted anonymously online.

Instructional Technologies

The use of a freely available blog was chosen as the primary facilitating technology for this instruction. Blogs provide a means to embed a central message within a network of links to the greater web. The blog is therefore not intended to be a stand-alone unit, but a homepage that leads to a selected portion of the World Wide Web. Blogger was chosen to host the blog because it is a free service, with intuitive administrative control, and the ability to post images and surveys as well as text.

While blogs can be used to support discussion, the highly asynchronous and anonymous focus derived from the learner analysis prohibits this use. However, a wiki is used to provide a single document for each topic to share wisdom. PB Wiki was used because it is freely available. More importantly, the PB Wiki interface allows easy editing for those who are not familiar with wiki usage.

Element Analysis

The purpose of the instruction is to provide a collection of resources to assist returning students in improving their study skills. However, every student has different

deficiencies. Therefore, the primary activity, and the activity that opens the instruction, is two assessments that will help students to pinpoint the areas in which they excel and those which require more work. These activities acquaint the learner with his/her learning style and study skill strengths and weaknesses.

Resulting from the assessments, the learner will have data indicating in which topics they excel and in which they are deficient. To encourage knowledge creation and sharing, the learner is asked to share his/her own tips and insights with others on a wiki site in the topics in which they excel. Additionally, they are encouraged to read the tips and insights in the topics in which they are deficient. In this way, learners may benefit from others' experience and reflect on and display their current knowledge.

After reading the content for each topic in which he/she is deficient, the learner is asked to complete a poll to facilitate processing. Ostensibly, the questions are to help us improve the module; however, they also require mentally reviewing the content learned in each topic and reflecting on its utility. These questions should help the learner process how useful the module content was, how his/her study habits may change after reading the module, and how the module content could be improved.

At the end of each section, the learner is asked to reflect on his/her own situation and how the content could be applied in that situation. This reflection serves the purpose of prompting the learner to generalize the information learned. If the learner is able to visualize how they will use the information in the future, they will be better able to apply the content.

Finally, the learner is encouraged to try the tips offered in the module. He/she is encouraged to note whether the tips save time, effort, or produce better results. The

module is continuously available so that it may serve as an aid or refresher course as the content is applied.

The elements also use a range of devices so as to accommodate a number of Gardner's multiple intelligences (2006). While the dominant activity is processing written text, the instruction also entails mathematical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal work. Additionally, the site offers visual appeal. The picture of the brain illustrates the process of studying. A visual/spatial learner could easily grasp the relationships of this module's concepts via this illustration. The stages of the experiential learning cycle and the intelligence accommodated by each element is listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

The Relationship Between the Learning Activity and the Stage of the Experiential Learning Cycle and the Intelligence Emphasized

Activity	Experiential Learning Cycle Stage	Gardner's Intelligence
Complete assessments	Experiencing	Logical/mathematical Intrapersonal
Contribute to the wiki	Publishing	Verbal/linguistic Interpersonal
Complete the site poll	Processing	Intrapersonal
Reflection on personal application	Generalizing	Intrapersonal
Use the tips for studying	Applying	Intrapersonal
Total	5 stages	4 intelligences

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